SWIC-TO-STO ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

The National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC) developed this primer based on the experiences of NCSWIC members to help Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (SWICs) navigate a relationship with their State Training Officers (STOs).

WHAT IS A STO?

While a STO's role may differ in each state, STOs are generally responsible for overseeing their state's emergency management training programs, including developing short and long-term training and exercise objectives; coordinating course curriculums, instructors, access, and attendance; developing certification standards; and engaging stakeholders in training and exercise planning or integrated preparedness planning workshops (TEPW/IPPW). STOs coordinate with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Management Institute (EMI), and other federal departments and agencies to receive technical assistance offerings and education. STOs also engage the private sector on emerging technologies and end user training.

WHY ENGAGE?

A functional SWIC/STO relationship can improve state public safety communications capabilities and readiness by leveraging influence and expertise across state functional areas and departments.

- STOs can promote CISA and FEMA-sponsored communications courses among state, local, tribal, and territorial stakeholders.

- STOs are integral to consistent and realistic communications scenarios and participation in emergency management exercises at all levels of government.

- STOs may invite the SWIC to attend TEPWs/IPPWs, which would socialize the SWIC position with participatory stakeholders and capitalize on the SWIC's expertise in identifying communications gaps during exercises and real-world event observations.

- STOs have proprietary resources and partnerships they can make available to SWICs.

- A SWIC's expertise in communications systems, functions, responsibilities, and policies places them in the best position to assist the STO by advising on or leading communications-specific training and exercise coordination efforts.

- SWICs can provide STOs with insight into the latest field issues that can be incorporated into future trainings and exercises, and leverage their relationships with stakeholders and subject matter experts directly via communications committee or interoperability council meetings.

- SWICs can provide access to CISA's emergency communications, cybersecurity, and infrastructure security technical assistance resources.

- SWICs can provide information regarding grants and other communications-specific funding mechanisms that can benefit the overarching state training and exercise program.

- SWICs and STOs often have very similar responsibilities (e.g., trainings and exercises, grant applications), but in different contexts. Working together would reduce duplication of effort and result in more responsible resource allocation.
  - Since SWICs and STOs do not often reside within the same office or department, regular coordination could capture gaps and requirements across state organizations.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

SWICs with effective relationships with their STOs suggest the following:

- Initiate regular meetings with the STO.

- Provide guiding documents (Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIPs), Tactical Interoperable Communication Plans (TICPs), etc.) to help communicate the roles and responsibilities of the SWIC and the importance of including communications scenarios in state trainings and exercises whenever appropriate.

- Convey clear goals and objectives developing a collaborative partnership. Is the primary goal to incorporate communications functions into all future trainings and exercises? Is it to be invited to planning meetings? What is the meeting cadence and format?

- Invite your STO to participate in SCIP preparation and development with CISA TA, Communications Unit working groups, and communications exercises.

IMPETUS FOR COLLABORATION

A mutual understanding of training and exercise activities and requirements may dictate the type and frequency of SWIC/STO collaboration. The following are activities that SWICs have noted may benefit from SWIC/STO collaboration:

- SCIP development workshops

- Training and exercise planning meetings

- Grant applications

- Urban Area Security Initiatives

- Statewide Interoperability Governing Body/Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee meetings

- TEPWs/IPPWs

- Vigilant Guard exercises

- Development of a tiered cadre of specially trained communications personnel

- Development of a database of state communications capabilities that should be trained and exercised regularly

- Exercises for planned events (National Special Security Events, other special events)

BEST PRACTICES

After surveying the NCSWIC community, the following emerged as best practices for both SWICs and STOs:

- If the state/territory does not have an engaged STO, maintain a good working relationship with CISA and other federal partners for training and exercise assistance and support.

- Identify all state training and exercise resources and subject matter expertise.

- SWICs' interdisciplinary expertise brings value to a SWIC/STO partnership.

- Since SWICs and STOs do not tend to reside within the same office or even the same department, it may be necessary to enlist departmental leadership in the development of a SWIC/STO partnership.

- Modify state onboarding standard operating procedures (SOPs) for SWICs and STOs to include the development of a SWIC/STO relationship.

- Both the SWIC and the STO will share the responsibility of endorsing instructor candidates for state-sponsored CISA and EMI courses.

- SWICs should be proactive in engaging with STOs.